

University of Northern Colorado

## Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

---

Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

---

### Scholars Solve Mystery of 107 Year Old Bent's fort

Rocky Mountain News

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/beol>

---

# Scholars

The first accurate description of old Bent's Fort, early Colorado settlement, has come to light in faint, 107-year-old pencil scratchings on the margins and back of a watercolor portrait of a Cheyenne Indian.

Dr. LeRoy R. Hafen, state historian, disclosed the "find" yesterday.

The information, he said, will be invaluable in the State Historical Society's plans for restoration of the old abode fort east of La Junta which once stood astride of the fabled Santa Fe Trail.

The fort's measurements, lost for more than a century, have been found on a painting in the collection of Fred Rosenstock, Denver book dealer and collector of Western Americana.

## UNAWARE OF PRIZE

Although he purchased the painting more than 15 years ago in a group of other papers about Bent's Fort, Mr. Rosenstock had been unaware he possessed the only known exact description of the fur trade outpost.

The description came to light in an almost fiction-style episode of scholarly detective work.

The historical society recently acquired from the La Junta Daughters of the American Revolution the site of the old fort with a view to restoring it.

Dr. Hafen dug into every known document and book mentioning the fort seeking data to be used for detailed plans in re-building the adobe walls and bastions which overlooked the Arkansas River. He found several sketches and drawings of the fort, and many word descriptions of it, but total confusion on measurements.

## EXACT DESCRIPTION

Mr. Rosenstock's manuscript discloses Bent's Fort has 14-foot walls, the east wall measured 137 feet, the north, 178. And the bastions were 27 feet in diameter and 18 feet high. The front gate stood 7 feet high and 6½ feet wide.

Bent's Fort was built, Dr. Hafen said, by William Bent and his brother, Charles, later territorial governor of New Mexico,

# Oil Scratchings on Portrait of Indian Give

# Solve Mystery of 107-Yo

along with Ceran St. Vrain.

Lt. J. W. Abert of the U. S. Army visited the fort in 1845, and his drawing of it long has been regarded as the most satisfactory known, Dr. Hafen said. The young lieutenant, who had difficulty with most of his subjects at West Point with the exception of art, returned to the fort in 1846.

## FELL SICK AT FORT

Lieutenant Abert fell sick at

the fort, and while recovering made several drawings of it and painted portraits of the Indians.

Neither his diary nor his formal report to the Army, however, gave the measurements he told of taking.

Knowing that Mr. Rosenstock had in his collection the manuscript of Lieutenant Abert's 1846 diary and a book of his drawings, Dr. Hafen telephoned him and asked him to

look  
see  
FIN

M  
han  
no  
thro  
and  
the  
col  
ten  
"A  
Be

# Give Description of Settlement

## 7-Year-Old Bent's Fort

Fort

look under the Sept. 8 date to see if figures were given.

### FINDS PENCIL MARKINGS

Mr. Rosenstock read the handwritten account, but found no figures. He then thumbed through the book of drawings and noticed for the first time the pencil markings on a water-color portrait the artistic lieutenant drew of a Cheyenne, "Ah - Mah - Nah - Co," or "The Bear Above."

Close inspection of the lines and figures proved them to be a detailed ground plan of the fort, with measurements drawn in blueprint style for walls, rooms, gates, bastions and all.

The ground plan appears on the reverse side of the painting of "Bear Above." Around the margins of the painting itself, Lieutenant Abert sketched exterior and interior views of the fort.